

# *Coronavirus (COVID-19) information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*

**IT'S OUR JOB  
PROTECT OUR MOB**

This fact sheet provides information on what you can do to help keep mob safe and protect them from coronavirus (COVID-19). It's important that we all take steps to slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) or it could have a long and devastating impact for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

## **What is coronavirus (COVID-19)?**

COVID-19 is a new type of coronavirus that causes an infection in people, including a severe respiratory illness. Thousands of people in Australia have been infected by coronavirus (COVID-19), including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

## **Why are mob more at risk?**

While we are still learning about coronavirus (COVID-19), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over the age of 50-years or those that have a pre-existing health condition, such as diabetes, asthma, heart and lung conditions, or immune problems are at higher risk of developing a severe illness associated with coronavirus (COVID-19).

As a lot of mob often live under the same roof, it's harder to practice physical distancing and self-isolation, which increases the risk of spreading the disease within the community.

## **What are the symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19)?**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are at a higher-risk of getting coronavirus (COVID-19) and may experience more severe symptoms, including:

- Fever
- Breathing difficulties such as breathlessness
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Fatigue or tiredness.

## **How can I get tested?**

If you are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and are experiencing any symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) including fever, shortness of breath, cough or a sore throat, it is really important that you get tested.

Call the dedicated coronavirus (COVID-19) hotline on 1800 675 398 for advice.

## **How does coronavirus (COVID-19) spread?**

Coronavirus (COVID-19) spreads like the flu, from having close contact with someone who is either contagious or already infected; mostly through face-to-face or within a household. Some people don't show signs when they are sick, but they can still spread it to others.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) can't jump across a room and it can't travel long distances in the air, but it can be picked up from contaminated surfaces, it can stay alive on surfaces for 2-5 days.

You can catch coronavirus (COVID-19) from someone who is either contagious or already infected through close contact. This means having face-to-face contact for more than 15 minutes or sharing an enclosed space with them for more than two hours.

Having close contact could include:

- living in the same household or household-like setting (for example, a boarding school or hostel)
- direct contact with the body fluids or laboratory specimens of someone with coronavirus (COVID-19)
- being in the same room for two hours or more
- face-to-face contact for more than 15 minutes in some other setting such as in a car or a lift or sitting next to them on public transport.

## How do I reduce the risk of contracting and spreading coronavirus (COVID-19)?

- **Stay home** – there are only four reasons to be out: to get food and supplies that you need, exercise, medical care and caregiving, work and education – if necessary.
- **Practice good hygiene** – wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap. Don't share drink bottles or cigarettes. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow. You don't need to wear a mask unless you're unwell.
- **Stop gathering with mob** – you can't gather with more than two people outside of your household. If you have more than two people in your house, that's ok, but no more are allowed to visit. Mob, family and kin should not be camping at or visiting your house. Only the people who live in your house should be there. You could receive a fine of \$1,652 if you are in a public place in a group of more than two people.
- **Keep your distance** – keep at least 1.5 m between yourself and others. This is also called social or physical distancing.
- **Greet mob from afar** – even though it is cultural, and a sign of respect, handshakes, hugs and kisses are not safe at the moment. If you see mob around, keep 1.5 metres apart and give a proper blackfella wave instead.
- **Keep healthy** – make sure you keep exercising, drink water, get plenty of sleep, and now is the time to quit smoking. Call Quitline on 137 848.
- **No camping on Country** – while being on Country or in the bush is important for mob, it is not safe to do so at this point.
- **Keep sorry business to 10 people** – no more than 10 people are allowed at any funeral service. While sorry business is important, these rules are here to help protect mob. By not adhering to this rule, you could get an on the spot fine.
- **Yarn online** – if you want to catch up and yarn with mob, use Facebook, FaceTime or just the deadly phone like the old days.
- **Keep your hands off your face** – try not to touch your face, as much as possible as germs can move from your hands and into your body through your eyes nose and mouth.

## How do I get medicine and see a Doctor?

Phone your GP or Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (ACCHO) first if you need medical attention, they will tell you what to do.

If you take medication contact your local GP, ACCHO or pharmacist to ensure you have supplies.

Contact your local GP or ACCHO and get the flu shot. This won't protect you from coronavirus (COVID-19), but it will reduce your risk of getting the flu which will keep you healthy.

## How can I help mob that can't leave their home?

Family or friends who are not required to be self-isolated can help mob who can't leave their home.

Emergency relief packages are available for mob who are in mandatory self-isolation due to coronavirus (COVID-19). They contain essential food and personal care items for people who have little or no food, and no network of family and friends to support them.

To access a package, call the coronavirus (COVID-19) hotline on **1800 675 398** which operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you need an interpreter, call TIS National on 131 450.

## Can I care for Elders?

Caregiving is one of the four reasons you can leave the house, and you can visit Elders and other people for this purpose.

However, remember that Elders and any Aboriginal person over 50-years is at higher risk of contracting coronavirus (COVID-19) and experiencing severe symptoms. If providing care is not necessary, you should stay home and stay connected by phone or online.

If you live with an Elder or Aboriginal person over 50-years, that is ok.

If you are a caregiver, you need to do everything to reduce your risk of contracting or spreading coronavirus (COVID-19). This means staying at home as much as you can, keeping 1.5m apart from others and practicing good hygiene.

And remember, if you're feeling sick, isolate yourself and arrange for someone else to provide care.

## Can children travel between the houses of their parents or carers?

If children need to travel between the houses of their parents or carers, that is ok. All shared custody arrangements should continue as normal.

If you need to leave the house, you can take your children to the house of a friend or family member.

Remember, there are only four reasons to be out: to get food and supplies that you need, exercise, medical care and caregiving, work and education – if necessary.

## Can we still get together outside for gatherings and events?

Gatherings of more than two people in public are restricted. We understand restricting, postponing or cancelling events is difficult, particularly those of cultural significance – both celebrations and sorry business, but it is what we need to do to keep mob safe.

To help prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), there are new rules about how people meet in public places. By not adhering to these rules, you could receive an on-the-spot fine. The rules include:

- No public gatherings of more than 2 people except for members of your household and for work or education purposes. This rule only applies in Victoria, but other states have similar restrictions.
- All shops and business can only allow 1 person per 4 square metres, meaning you may have to wait to enter. This includes supermarkets and chemists.
- 10 or less people can attend a funeral
- 5 or less people can attend a wedding (including the couple, the celebrant and witnesses)

Most public gathering places are closed in Victoria to protect the community and prevent people from spreading coronavirus (COVID-19). There are some exceptions for essential services and businesses, more information can

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be found on the department's dedicated page for coronavirus (COVID-19\_ here:  
<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-new-restrictions-and-closures>

Being the school holidays, this may be a tough period for some to have to stay home all day throughout the holidays – but it is very important to stop the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

To receive this publication in an accessible format phone 03 9096 5656, or email [Aboriginal Strategy and Oversight](mailto:aboriginalstrategyandoversight@dhhs.vic.gov.au) <aboriginalstrategyandoversight@dhhs.vic.gov.au>.

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